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Management program helps commands keep budgets trim

By [Jimmy Norris](#), Stars and Stripes

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YONGSAN GARRISON, South Korea — The 8th U.S. Army held a ceremony last week to celebrate the certification of its newest “black belts” and “green belts.”

But these warriors aren’t battling ninjas — they’re fighting their way through red tape and government bureaucracy as members of the Lean Six Sigma program.

The Army adopted the management science program last year to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Eighth Army civilians and servicemembers graduated from their initial training about a year ago and have continued working toward last week’s certification. They’ve trained through a cycle of classroom training followed by projects to improve workplace efficiency.

Ron Rezek, who works at the Office of the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense, talked to Stars and Stripes before Thursday’s ceremony.

“For years this kind of mathematical rigor has been applied in the medical community and the operational community,” Rezek said. “You wouldn’t want anything less if you were flying a plane.”

Rezek said many companies, including Bank of America, John Deere and Caterpillar, use the system. It was recently adopted by the Defense Department, meaning it will trickle down to all

the services.

Rezek said the 8th Army was the first to graduate black and green belts because the command spent about \$300,000 of its training budget to support the program.

The next step for the certified black belts is to continue their training in Washington, D.C., and become master black belts.

"The whole process is continuous. It's a never-ending journey," said 8th Army certified black belt John Di Genio. "We learned a skill set, but that was just half the battle."

Certified green belt Joseph Rushing, a work supervisor at the Materiel Support Center-Korea, explained how his training has helped effectiveness in his command.

For his green belt project, Rushing's supervisor told him to investigate why MSC-K's battery shop had a backlog of about 3,000 batteries waiting to be recharged and put into tactical vehicles.

The shop, Rushing said, processed about 16,000 depleted batteries a year, of which about 75 percent were unserviceable. He said many batteries that would deplete quickly were being put back into vehicles.

"We also charged the full price, as if it was a new battery, but we had no guarantee on them," said Rushing. "They would only last three to five months, but we couldn't get rid of them as long as they would take a charge."

He said it was costing about \$270,000 a year in man-hours to produce batteries that could fail.

He said the problem was solved in November when, instead of recharging the used batteries, the shop sold them to a contractor for about \$9,000.

The battery shop no longer handles used batteries. With the backlog eliminated they were able to reduce the processing time on a new battery from nine days to three.

The shop, which had been allocated three employees, had been using a total of six — three of whom were borrowed from other sections within MSC-K. Rushing said eliminating the backlog allowed the shop to send the borrowed manpower back to other sections of MSC-K.

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